

## Frequently Asked Questions about DHHR's numbers for COVID-19 March 27, 2020

The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) has developed a fact sheet regarding the COVID-19 case numbers it shares with the public.

DHHR is the official reporting agency for COVID-19, which in turn provides official case numbers to the CDC. Medical providers are required to report test results to their local health departments, which provide them to DHHR. Commercial/private labs are also required to report test results to DHHR. However, the reporting of negative and pending tests to DHHR has been inconsistent, thus causing a delay in official reporting.

### **Q: What must be reported to DHHR?**

**A:** COVID-19 is a new disease and therefore, newly reportable to West Virginia's public health system. Medical providers are required to report test results to their local health departments, which provide them to DHHR. Commercial (private) labs are also required to report test results to DHHR.

### **Q: What COVID-19 data is DHHR releasing?**

**A:** The figures on [coronavirus.wv.gov](https://coronavirus.wv.gov) show the number of:

- All officially reported positive test results in West Virginia
- All officially reported negative test results
- Tests with results pending which are being processed at the state's public health lab
- All official deaths

DHHR is also issuing press releases daily with these totals as well as the number of positive results reported that day.

### **Q: How frequently is DHHR updating these COVID-19 numbers?**

**A:** The evening update occurs once all testing at the state lab has been run for the day. As a result, the time of that final daily update will vary.

### **Q: Are these figures truly totals for all of West Virginia?**

**A:** For positive cases, **yes**. Because of the reporting requirements, **the official "Total Positive Cases" figure is the most reliable available statewide for West Virginia.**

However, the reporting of negative and pending tests to DHHR has been inconsistent. Only DHHR's state lab has consistently reported all its negative results and pending tests. DHHR is working with its public and private partners to ensure all required information is properly reported.

### **Q: What details are DHHR providing about each case?**

**A:** DHHR is currently providing a breakdown of known (positive) cases by county.

### **Q: Why isn't DHHR providing more details about each positive case?**

**A:** DHHR is exploring the release of additional details from the data it receives but faces limitations arising from the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). To protect the privacy and dignity of all West Virginians in accordance with HIPAA, disclosing cases by city or town is not anticipated at this time. There are also other limitations. For example, not all results reported to DHHR include ages or genders.

For more information about HIPAA and its protections: <https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-individuals/index.html>.

### **Q: Why are DHHR's numbers sometimes different from those reported by other sources?**

**A:** Local health departments receive reports of cases in their areas before DHHR does. Some hospitals, meanwhile, can now test more quickly than before. As a result, these sources sometimes announce results before reporting them to DHHR.

In addition, some labs can report results electronically while other submit them on paper. This disparity can also delay the receipt of results by DHHR.

As CDC explains: “State and local public health departments are now testing and publicly reporting their cases. In the event of a discrepancy between CDC cases and cases reported by state and local public health officials, data reported by states should be considered the most up to date.”

**Q: Why isn't DHHR updating these numbers more frequently?**

**A:** DHHR's goal is to provide accurate and reliable information to West Virginians. The current approach provides the most reliable way to ensure solid data.

While reporting the number of known cases serves an important public purpose, **all West Virginians should be conducting themselves as if positive cases have been reported in their counties and communities.**

As Gov. Justice's Stay at Home executive order makes clear: every West Virginian should remain in their residence unless performing an essential activity. When performing such activities, every West Virginian must stay at least six feet from others and avoid gatherings of 10 or more people.

**Q: Does a positive case reported in my county mean I should be tested?**

**A:** Not everyone needs to be tested for COVID-19, even with known cases in their area. DHHR will provide specific guidance regarding testing whenever appropriate. Local health departments also have discretion regarding testing, as do individual health care providers. Guidance on testing is available from CDC, which also offers an online “Self-Checker” tool: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/testing.html>.

**Q: I've been tested, but I've not received my results. Can DHHR or my local health department provide them?**

**A:** Contact the provider or lab that tested you for your results. The DHHR state lab and the local health departments can only provide results for tests they conducted.